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Philippines wins "Asia's Leading Dive Destination" at prestigious World Travel Awards 2023

Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam - Solidifying its status as the ultimate diving destination in the region, the Philippines has clinched for the fifth consecutive year the Asia's Leading Dive Destination title at the preeminent World Travel Awards (WTA) Asia & Oceania Gala Ceremony 2023.

Philippine Department of Tourism (DOT) Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco announced the remarkable feat last September 6, following the WTA Asia & Oceania Gala Ceremony 2023 that took place at the GEM Center in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

"The Philippines' fifth consecutive win as Asia's Leading Dive Destination further affirms the unparalleled beauty and megabiodiversity of our country loved by divers and tourists all over the world," enthused Secretary Frasco, who is a dive advocate and certified diver herself.

The tourism chief added that "this is a testament to the Philippines' commitment to sustainable tourism development and our strengthened collaboration with tourism stakeholders. From our ridges to our reefs, you will never run out of reasons to Love the Philippines!"

Elevating the Dive tourism portfolio

Under President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr.'s administration, Secretary Frasco, who is a certified diver, has been leading the DOT in elevating the country's dive tourism industry.

The DOT created the first-ever Dive Committee that will align its dive product development and promotion thrusts with its attached agencies, the Tourism Infrastructure and Enterprise Zone Authority (TIEZA), the Tourism Promotions Board (TPB) Philippines, and the Philippine Commission for Sports Scuba Diving (PCSSD).

The DOT will likewise convene the country's national dive stakeholders in the first-ever Philippine Dive Dialogue in Cebu next week to consolidate all the efforts of the national government, local governments, and private sector partners.

Moreover, the DOT, through its infrastructure arm, TIEZA, eyes the installation of additional hyperbaric chambers that will improve scuba diving safety standards in strategic dive locations, such as Dumaguete and Daanbantayan in Cebu, by 2024.

The agency has also launched its own dive expo brand, the Philippine International Dive Expo (PHIDEX), the world's only dive show that combines a dive travel exchange, a business-to-business (B2B) meeting program, dive conferences and seminars, exhibition booths, and familiarization tours to key and emerging Philippine dive destinations. The fourth edition of PHIDEX is scheduled for February next year.

The Department continuously hosts regional dive-centric events, including the DOT Office of Product and Market Development - Dive Team's Anilao Underwater Shootout in Batangas, the DIVE7 Festival series by the DOT Region VII office, the Davao Dive Expo by the DOT Region XI office, and the NorthMin Dive by the DOT Region X office —which opened yesterday (Sept. 6)—among others. The Department also extended its support to a multitude of diving initiatives, assessments, and expeditions, including the Cebu Travel Catalogue, the Bohol Loop Dive Expo (BHOLDEX), the 3rd MisOr Dive Festival, Samal Island Dive Seafari, Bay Deep Mati Freediving Festival, and numerous others.

2023 World Travel Awards

DOT Undersecretary Shahlimar Hofer Tamano personally received the WTA Asia's Leading Dive Destination 2023 trophy, which was awarded based on public votes and validation from the group's panel of travel professionals. Philippine private tourism stakeholders also bagged notable victories at the WTA Asia & Oceania Gala Ceremony 2023, being named in the following Asian and country categories: Okada Manila (Asia's Leading Casino Resort), Discovery Shores Boracay (Philippines' Leading Beach Resort 2023), Travelite Travel and Tours Co. (Philippines' Leading Destination Management Company 2023), and Seda Hotels (Philippines' Leading Hotel Group 2023), among others.

Regional edition awardees, along with runners-up and previous year's winners, are qualified for the WTA's World edition, which will have its grand awards night in Muscat, Oman in November 2023.

Established in 1993, the WTA is now globally recognized as the "ultimate hallmark of excellence" in the tourism and hospitality industries. The WTA encompasses country awards, regional awards, and world awards. ***DOT***

Frasco cites PBBM's policies, programs for the industry at PTM 2023

Pasay City, Philippines - As the country's tourism consistently proves itself to be a strong and reliable pillar of economic growth, President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. said last September 01, that policies and programs that will upgrade critical tourism infrastructure; and capacity-building for the workforce and entrepreneurs are already underway.

In his speech read by Tourism Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco during the 34th Philippine Travel Mart (PTM) opening ceremony, the President said his Administration's whole-of-nation efforts are aimed at leveraging on tourism's strengths and competitive advantages to solidify the sector's economic position in this age of "revenge travel".

"As you continue to invest your energies and passion into your trade and craft, you can be assured of this Administration's fervent support for the entire tourism industry," the Tourism Chief quoted President Marcos, Jr., who committed of creating a wholesome climate and stable foundation, by fostering more business-friendly environment, as well as improving the security and the rule of law.

The President also acknowledged the vital contributions of small business players and the local government units in the robust performance of Philippine tourism over the years, providing livelihood opportunities to more than five million Filipinos today.

"Of course, we must not overlook our Local Government Units, the private sector, especially our Micro, Small, and Medium enterprises, whose efforts are just as indispensable to the vibrant performance of our tourism industry across the country," he added.

President Marcos, Jr. lauded the tireless efforts as well of the Department of Tourism under Secretary Frasco and the Philippine Tour Operators Association, Inc. (PHILTOA), calling them as "key players of the industry" and "government's staunch partners throughout this nation-building journey."

In her separate presentation, Secretary Frasco bannered some of the big wins of the country's tourism industry in the post-pandemic era. "As of August this year, we have recorded a total of 3.64 million international arrivals since January," she shared while noting that the figure is already 75.92 percent of the country's target of 4.8 million this year.

"We have built the momentum for the tourism industry of the Philippines, and this Philippine Travel Mart is another driving force to push the tourism industry closer to its pre-pandemic levels and further to even exceed it," the Tourism Chief added.

Recalling the President's directive, Secretary Frasco further said that it is the DOT's objective to prioritize the emerging destinations of the country. *"This three-day event gives our tour operators a chance to showcase their unique travel packages across our country, [and] it allows our travel enthusiasts to have diverse and affordable options,"* noted the Tourism Secretary.

One-stop-shop travel fair

Happening from 01 to 03 September at Halls 1 to 4 of the SMX Convention Center, SM Mall of Asia Complex, the PTM is a powerhouse annual event that brings together the accommodation sector, travel agencies, tour operators, theme parks, airlines, and other tourism-related establishments.

As a one-stop-shop travel trade show, travel-minded public can avail of discounted vacation packages and tour promos from over 200 exhibitors representing the various regions from Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao.

PHILTOA president Fe Abling-Yu highlighted that this latest edition of PTM embraces love for travel and discovery. *"If there is anything that the recent pandemic restrictions have taught us, it is to love our freedom to travel, our freedom to explore. Let us take advantage of this freedom to make new discoveries. I encourage the public to discover other beautiful destinations of our archipelago… As we embark on this journey on the Philippine Travel Mart, let us do so with our open hearts [and] open minds. Let us explore, [and] discover [while] employing love with the treasures our beautiful nation has to offer,"* she said.

Diversity on display

In its 34th edition, the PTM offers a diverse and wide array of tourism products from a variety of exhibitors. Guests will have a visual feast of the different installations, booths, and displays showing the rich and exciting tourism offerings available in the country.

As added features to this year's travel fair, PTM has dedicated zones for meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions (M.I.C.E.), outdoor tourism activities, as well as niche and major tourism portfolios such as sun and beach, cruise offerings, and marine sports, culture and heritage, farm tourism, health and wellness, and culinary packages, among others.

The PTM began as a DOT initiative in 1989, with the primary objective of catering both to trade and consumer market. In 1994, the PHILTOA embraced its mandate to ensure the annual staging of the PTM, and since then organized, managed, and operated the event as its flagship project.

"The Philippine Travel Mart reflects all the reasons to love the Philippines. All of our regions in the country are represented and they have brought the best of the best of their destinations—their products, their festivals, their indigenous peoples, especially from Mindanao, and it also shows how much our tourism stakeholders have worked so hard to ensure that the Philippine tourism rises back stronger than ever," Secretary Frasco added in a separate interview. ***DOT***

1st Philippine Tourism Dive Dialogue unites Dive Industry: 37B raked in 2022

Cebu City, Philippines - In a bid to further expand development of the country's dive tourism industry, the Department of Tourism (DOT) successfully mounted a nationwide convergence of hundreds of participants from the public and private sectors and the academe to tackle challenges and gain insights from industry experts and stakeholders for the inaugural Philippine Tourism Dive Dialogue (PTDD).

The event, held at the Fili Hotel at Nustar Cebu, featured important panel discussions that centered on Marine Environmental Protection and Conservation; Dive Niche Products: Free Diving, Scuba Diving, Black Water Diving, and Underwater Photography; Philippine Dive: Domestic/International Marketing Campaign; Safety, Standards, and Accreditation of Tourism-related Enterprises (TREs) for Scuba Diving; and Investment Opportunities in the Dive Industry.

The dialogue comes on the heels of The Philippines' fifth straight win as Asia's Leading Dive Destination at the prestigious World Travel Awards (WTA) 2023.

In an address, Tourism Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco emphasized the importance of the two-day convergence of relevant national and local government agencies as well as the Department's partners from the private sector in sustaining the successes of the country's dive tourism industry and in fulfillment of the directive of President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. for the Philippines to attain a tourism industry that is *"inclusive, where the benefits of tourism are felt far and wide across the countryside."*

"The effort, therefore, requires the ability to listen, to understand the prevailing challenges that are present and require solutions that can only be reached with collaboration, convergence, and unity. That is why early on, in the Marcos administration, we, in the Department of Tourism, mandated the formation of the very first DOT Dive Committee," Secretary Frasco said.

The DOT chief, a certified diver, sits as the chair of the Department's Dive Committee which brings together the DOT and its attached agencies, the Tourism Infrastructure and Enterprise Zone Authority (TIEZA), the Tourism Promotions Board (TPB), and the Philippine Commission on Sports Scuba Diving (PCSSD) to support the needs of the dive industry and expand its current portfolio.

A revenue driver industry

The contribution of the dive industry to Philippine tourism was evident in 2022, with the country gaining an estimated PHP 37 billion in tourist receipts from international dive visitors, which constituted over 17.5 percent of the country's entire tourism receipts last year.

According to the tourism chief, the hosting of the first-ever Dive Dialogue in Cebu is also fitting given Central Visayas' status as the country's premier dive tourist destination, as it is home to a multitude of world-class dive spots and is the most-visited destination among overnight regional travelers.

But while Central Visayas saw the inaugural Philippine Tourism Dive Dialogue, Secretary Frasco said that the event also puts the spotlight on many other key and emerging dive sites across the country.

"Hindi lang po yung Central Visayas 'yung fini-feature natin today. We have also invited our stakeholders from all over the Philippines in the effort to expand the dive tourism portfolio of the Philippines," Secretary Frasco explained in a media interview.

According to the Secretary, another goal of the DOT-led Dive Dialogue is to capture new tourist markets, specifically for diving.

"The focus of the Department of Tourism is to target various markets, whether that be families, solo travelers, luxe travelers, barkadas, and the like. And we have very specific programs that are targeted to various niche markets specifically for dive. We have dive enthusiasts from all over the world and many jurisdictions including North Asia, as well as Europe, to whom dive has been a very strong product for the Philippines. We fully intend to capitalize on that and open up to new markets, especially in Europe in the Middle East by making sure that we can collaborate with the Department of Transportation to mount more flights coming into the country from these jurisdictions," she added.

To bolster the local dive industry, the DOT, through its infrastructure arm, Tourism Infrastructure and Enterprise Zone Authority (TIEZA), has provided hyperbaric chambers in dive sites across the country to ensure that scuba divers will have access to affordable treatment for decompression sickness.

The four operational hyperbaric chambers can be found in Mabini, Batangas; Panglao, Bohol; Mandaue, Cebu; and Puerto Princesa, Palawan. Additional hyperbaric chambers will be placed in Dumaguete, Boracay, Puerto Galera, and Daanbantayan Island, according to the Secretary.

Other officials and guests present during the inaugural PTDD are Undersecretary and Con-current Regional Director for DOT-7 Shahlimar Hofer Tamano, Department of Transportation (DOTr) Undersecretary Elmer Francisco Sarmiento, Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Assistant Secretary Gilbert Gonzales, and Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) Assistant Secretary Lillian de Leon.

Also in attendance are Lone District of Antique Representative Antonio B. Legarda, Jr.; Cebu Provincial Government Board Member Andrei Duterte; Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) Vice Admiral Robert Patrimonio and Commodore Agapito Bibat; Maritime Industry Authority (MARINA) 7 Regional Director Emmanuel Carpio; and local mayors from the Visayas and Mindanao regions.

A preview of Cebu's culture, gastronomy

Meanwhile, participants of the first-ever Philippine Tourism Dive Dialogue got a preview of Cebu's rich culture and heritage, and a taste of the province's best delicacies at the welcome dinner hosted by Governor Gwen Garcia represented by Vice Governor Hilario Davide III for the delegates on Thursday (Sept. 14).

The dinner, held at the iconic Cebu Provincial Capitol was also made special by the performances of Cebuano cultural dancers who performed at the recently concluded Pasigarbo Sa Sugbo, the province's largest festival competition among its municipalities and cities.

Translating Love into Action

On the second day of the Dive Dialogue, Secretary Frasco led a coastal cleanup activity at the beachfront of the Mactan Shrine in Lapu-Lapu City, Cebu.

Speaking before divers, local officials, representatives from various national government agencies, and tourism stakeholders, Secretary Frasco emphasized the importance of "actualizing love" for the Philippines by doing small acts that would make a huge impact on the generations ahead.

"It is only right that the highlight of our very first Philippine Tourism Dive Dialogue is to actualize this love by protecting that which we love, our marine resources," the Tourism Chief said.

"Through this coastal cleanup today, we perpetuate not only the culture of conservation but also the culture of tourism, for conservation and tourism must go hand in hand if we are to preserve our beautiful and natural resources for the long run. Millions of lives depend upon our protection of the environment and our perpetuation of sustainable tourism. That is why any small act, including the picking up of debris from the coast, the underwater seas, does matter," she emphasized.

Secretary Frasco likewise wished for the protection of the environment, especially among tourists, to sustain the country's natural environment in the long run.

"It is my sincere hope that through our coming together—speaking, collaborating, finding solutions, and deepening our care for our coastal and underwater resources—through these acts, we would be able to begin opening up the minds of our fellow Filipinos as well as our tourists towards the imperative necessity of protecting and preserving our natural environment for now and for the future generations," she said.

In attendance during the coastal cleanup event were Mayor Junard "Ahong" Chan, Congresswoman Ma. Cynthia "Cindi" King Chan, and DENR provincial representative Cleo Colis. ***DOT***

Philippines' FIBA hosting boosts hotel occupancy, visitor arrivals – Tourism Chief

Manila, Philippines - The Philippines recently conquered the hard court with its successful hosting of the FIBA Basketball World Cup 2023.

The FIBA Basketball World Cup 2023, which the Philippines co-hosted with Japan and Indonesia, brought together thousands of local and international basketball fans in venues all over Metro Manila and Bulacan from August 25 until September 10, with over 38,000 spectators in attendance during the opening day at the Philippine Arena alone.

According to Tourism Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco, the country's historic hosting of a sporting event as big as the FIBA World Cup 2023 brought favorable developments to the tourism industry, particularly the accommodation sector where an uptick in occupancy rates was recorded throughout the tournament duration.

"FIBA Basketball World Cup 2023 has brought to the fore our excellent hospitality and the distinct Filipino virtues of familial welcome and warmth for our guests. The country's undisputed love for basketball also shone from our united support for our Gilas Team to the record-breaking attendance on opening day. This winning feat also manifested in tourism, with teams, basketball fans, families, and members of country delegations enjoying our accommodation and hospitality industries, and discovering our local destinations," the Tourism Chief said, revealing the Department's commitment to further develop the promising sports tourism portfolio.

Based on the report by the Department's National Capital Region Office (DOT-NCR), all nine (9) FIBA official hotels in the NCR—where most of the FIBA official venues were located—saw a higher average hotel occupancy from August 25 to September 12.

For instance, Conrad Manila reported a 100 percent average hotel occupancy from August 25 to September 12. Other hotels in Pasay also saw a higher average hotel occupancy, including Hotel101-Manila and Microtel MOA both reported 92 percent, Hilton Manila with 91.8 percent, and TRYP MOA with 91 percent. Meanwhile, Grand Hyatt Manila in Taguig also reported an impressive 96 percent hotel occupancy rate during the same period.

Boost in visitor arrivals

The DOT's Statistics, Economic Analysis and Information Management Division (SEAIMD) in a recent report likewise observed an increase in the volume of visitor arrivals to the Philippines from countries with FIBA Basketball World Cup 2023 participating teams for the period July 1 to September 12.

Out of the 20 countries with teams that competed in the recently-concluded sporting event, almost half registered a growth rate of more than 100 percent in terms of visitor arrivals to the Philippines from July 1 to September 12 versus the same period in 2022.

Among these countries with notable growth rate in arrivals to the Philippines during the specified period include: Dominican Republic (700%); Latvia (600%), China (595.85%); Lithuania (444.58 %); and Serbia (429.07%).

DOT, stakeholders all out in giving warm Filipino welcome

It can be recalled that President Marcos Jr. in August ordered the creation of an inter-agency task force that would coordinate efforts for the *"effective preparation and successful participation of all delegates in the FIBA World Cup 2023."* and with the Philippine Sports Commission (PSC) as lead agency.

Heeding the President's call for a whole-of-government approach towards the country's hosting of the FIBA World Cup 2023, the DOT offered its full support by way of efforts that will help promote the sporting event, and to ensure that teams and visiting fans are greeted with the distinct Filipino hospitality.

In addition to the Department conducting training sessions on the Filipino Brand of Service Excellence (FBSE) for close to 500 FIBA World Cup 2023 volunteers, as well as extending a warm reception to the FIBA participating teams, it partnered with its infrastructure arm, the Tourism Infrastructure and Enterprise Zone Authority (TIEZA), to enhance key areas, including airports, competition venues, as well as non-competition venues including official hotels, practice gyms, and fan zones.

Synergy of tourism consortium members to continue

In encouraging visitors to explore the country in between FIBA matches, the DOT rallied national tourism associations including the Philippine Tour Operators Association (PHILTOA), the Hotel Sales and Marketing Professionals (HSMA), the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA), and the Tourism Congress of the Philippines (TCP) in forming a tourism consortium that offered FIBA-exclusive tour packages to some of the country's tourism gems.

According to TCP President Bob Zozobrado, the consortium came out as one of the 'major wins', seeing how the private players came together to work on tourism packages and launch these in time for the FIBA Basketball World Cup 2023.

"The DOT has full support of the private sector. We were told in such a short time and practically, overnight, we are ready. That's how supportive the private sector is of whatever endeavor DOT involves itself with. We reassure Secretary Frasco that she can call on us anytime," Zozobrado said.

For PHILTOA President Fe Abling-Yu, the consortium allowed private tourism sector players to "synergize more on sports tourism" and realize the "great potential and demand" for this particular product.

"This partnership with all the associations, we extended this beyond the consortium. We partnered with our tour operators in Boracay, Coron, and in the other ten destinations. We did not only include the tour operators, but other sectors as well, including transportation. Ang magandang na-establish out of this, nagkaroon talaga ng one mind kaming mga private stakeholders, na let's gather ourselves and see how we can help the government, particularly the Department of Tourism, to align kung ano talaga ang kanilang adhikain," Abling-Yu added.

The MVP group and FIBA International in a separate effort have contracted the services of a travel and tours agency in offering activities including adventure, heritage, wellness, jeepney tours, and calesa rides to more than 700 delegates composed of VIPs and guests of the FIBA World Congress.

Members of the tourism consortium have positively welcomed the initiatives, noting that these contribute to the tourism industry as a whole.

"It showed the warmth and hospitality and the friendly people of the Philippines. They only saw Metro Manila because that was where the games were, but in terms of the support of the government to a private event, it was 100 percent," PATA Philippines Chapter Chairperson Maria Paz Alberto said.

"We are very happy that there are bookings," PATA Philippines Chapter board of trustee-treasurer Marlene Insigne added.

According to Secretary Frasco, the DOT hopes to further strengthen the strong public-private tourism partnership that started with FIBA Basketball World Cup 2023, especially with the Philippines' expected hosting of more important international events slated this year and 2024.

"Central to our whole-of-nation campaign effort to champion Philippine tourism under the Marcos administration is to support and work closely with all of our stakeholders from all aspects of the tourism value chain. Our hearts are filled with gratitude for our partners, especially the national tourism associations—the TCP, PHILTOA, PATA, and the HSMA—who without hesitation, answered the call to unite and work together in our earnest desire to encourage foreign and local basketball fans to explore and Love the Philippines," Secretary Frasco said.

"It is our hope that we can continue this tourism consortium as the country gears up for more big-ticket events," she added. ***DOT***

DOT, TPB bring back on-site PHITEX 2023 in Cebu

Cebu, Philippines - The Department of Tourism (DOT) through its marketing promotions arm, the Tourism Promotions Board (TPB) Philippines, last September 20, formally opened the 2023 edition of the Philippine Travel Exchange (PHITEX), considered as biggest government-organized travel trade event in the country.

As the keynote speaker for PHITEX 2023, Tourism Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco, a proud Cebuana, expressed her gratitude to the hundreds of buyer delegates from 19 countries and Philippine tourism sellers and stakeholders in attendance in Cebu.

"Our gratitude goes to you for your continued belief in the potential of Philippine tourism, and your love for the Philippines," Secretary Frasco said, as she disclosed the DOT's plans and programs under the Marcos administration.

"At the start of the administration of our President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos, Jr., he recognized the enormous potential of tourism to be a reliable pillar for the economic resurgence of our country coming out of the pandemic and the various calamities that came upon our shores," Secretary Frasco added.

In reintroducing the Philippines as a competitive tourism destination to the ASEAN region and in the world, Secretary Frasco shared the DOT's plans and programs aimed at promoting ecotourism, the development of tourism communities across the country, fostering robust private sector participation to promote heritage protection, diversification of the country's tourism portfolio, and other initiatives that will benefit tourism stakeholders.

She likewise cited the country's important global industry positions, including the role as lead country coordinator for the preparation of the ASEAN Tourism Strategic Plan (ATSP) 2025 that will succeed the existing ASTP 2016-2025 plan and ensure that the ASEAN will remain to be a responsible, sustainable, inclusive and balanced tourism region, and as Vice President of the 25th General Assembly of the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), and as Chair of the UNWTO Regional Commission for East Asia and the Pacific.

Further, the DOT chief also shared before international buyers and Philippine sellers, updates on the country's continuing path towards full tourism recovery. As of September 19, 2023, she disclosed, the Philippines has already received over 3.8 million international visitors, which reflects over 80% of the target set for 2023 and has raked in for the country over 316.9 billion pesos in estimated revenue. "We are very hopeful that with the business-to-business exchanges that you will have today and in the coming days, you as well will contribute greatly to the Philippine tourism landscape and economy."

The Secretary also disclosed the DOT's strides taken towards its renewed focus on the equalization of tourism product development and promotions across the Philippines, which the PHITEX 2023, aptly adapts in its activities such as the tours for buyers which encompasses visits to community-based tourism sites across the country's various regions, and puts the spotlight on grassroots initiatives, local textiles, culinary offerings, ecotourism activities, among others.

"The inclusivity of this program beckons international buyers to explore the rich diversity that our country has to offer. But what truly sets us apart as a tourism destination is no other than the best asset of Philippine tourism—the Filipino people. Filipinos are known all over the world for that distinct warmth and hospitality, our welcoming smiles, and our genuine love of life and everyone that comes into our country. We're eager to share our culture and traditions with visitors from all over the world," she added, noting that the DOT, under the Marcos administration, recently launched the Love the Philippines tourism branding to herald this enhanced value proposition.

"As we stand at the threshold of the golden era of tourism, we see a future where Philippine tourism shines brighter than ever before, where every visitor leaves not only with cherished memories, but with a piece of our nation in their hearts," she enthused.

PHITEX returns to on-site format

This year's PHITEX proved special, as it marks the resumption of the on-site staging of the event after the DOT and TPB held virtual and hybrid editions in recent years due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Further, for its 2023 edition, PHITEX has returned to Cebu, 16 years after the city first hosted the event in 2007.

Scheduled from 19-26 September 2023, this year's PHITEX with the theme "Tourism Sustainability in the Era of Internet of Things", invited hundreds of buyer delegates, local seller companies and delegates to a series of activities under the hallmark event components of the PHITEX including the Philippine Educational Program (PEP) Talk, Travel Exchange (TRAVEX) business-to-business (B2B) networking, as well as pre- and post-event tours for buyers.

Delivering her opening remarks, TPB Chief Operating Officer Maria Margarita Nograles, noted the timeliness and relevance of the theme. "The Internet of Things, or IoT, has been a presence for years, and its reach has kept on expanding, altering our industry, and redefining the tourist experience with a mere click of a button. Let's not overlook the ascendant force of AI or Artificial Intelligence, which is rapidly also shaping our sector," she said.

The whole-day PEP Talk held September 19 at the Jpark Island Resort & Waterpark and attended by some 500 delegates, featured discussions on relevant and vital topics to the travel and hospitality industry, including market updates, tourism trends, and travel innovations. These discussions served as a prelude to the whole-day B2B meetings scheduled from September 20 to 21 at the Fili Hotel at Nustar Cebu.

Meanwhile, the pre-tours arranged for buyers on September 19 provided buyers with an option to take a Cebu countryside tour, or a Cebu City tour complete with an inspection of a few of its world-class accommodation properties.

In a strategic move for PHITEX 2023, the post-event tours for foreign buyers happening from September 22 onwards, will be highlighted thematically per each module and will offer a wide array of activities that target every interest of the buyers for their respective market/s, such as Nature and Adventure tour in Davao, Bukidnon, and Cagayan de Oro; Dine and Drive in Pampanga and La Union; Triple C (Calm, Culture, Culinary) in Romblon and Boracay; Wellness and Fun Dive in Coron, Palawan; Culinary, Culture, and Heritage in Ilocos Region; Triple F (Faith, Farm, Fun) in Cebu and Negros Oriental; and Arts and History in the City of the Old and the New featuring Manila and Rizal.

Close to 100 buyers from Australia, Canada, China, Germany, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Poland, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, United Arab Emirates (UAE), United Kingdom, and the United States of America (USA) joined this year's travel trade event.

Concluding her remarks at the event, Secretary Frasco expressed her optimism on the PHITEX 2023 and congratulated the TPB Philippines led by COO Nograles, tourism stakeholders, sellers, and buyers, for the National Tourism Initiative of the Year Award bestowed upon the TPB for the successful 2022 PHITEX, at The Gov Media Awards 2023 presented by Gov Media Magazine in Singapore earlier this year.

"I am hopeful that the successes of PHITEX 2022 can be mirrored, if not exceeded by all of the exchanges and convergences and collaborations that you will have amongst each other here in Cebu," she said. ***DOT***

Film Heritage building to rise, boost PH film tourism

Makati, Philippines - A Film heritage building will soon rise in the historic Walled City of Intramuros in Manila as the Department of Tourism (DOT) and its infrastructure arm, Tourism Infrastructure and Enterprise Zone Authority (TIEZA), formally sealed a 22-year agreement with the Film Development Council of the Philippines (FDCP), last September 26, at the DOT Central Office in Makati City.

The building, which will occupy the 800 sqm lot along Sta. Lucia St. in Intramuros, beside "Beaterio de la Compania de Jesus", and TIEZA's Light and Sound Museum, will be designed in such a way that it will house a cinematheque, film museum/gallery, film and media library, film storage/vaults, and film scanning and restoration room. It will also accommodate FDCP offices, lounge areas, board room, as well as a merchandise shop and a cafe. The said property will be utilized with consent from the Department of Finance (DOF), the registered owner of the lot.

The ceremonial signing of the MOA was led by DOT Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco, TIEZA Chief Operating Officer (COO) Mark Lapid, and FDCP Chair and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Tirso Cruz III, witnessed by DOT Undersecretary Mae Elaine Bathan, TIEZA Assistant COO Jetro Lozada, and FDCP Executive Director Dan Morales.

"I join the FDCP and the TIEZA in this joyful celebration and thanksgiving that a project that honors the film heritage of the Philippines will finally be able to break ground figuratively and literally soon," the tourism chief began her address during the MOA signing.

To recall, FDCP chair Cruz first came to DOT to share his project proposition and other aspirations for the film industry back in August.

"Film has the power to distill these moments, memories, and vestiges of our culture into an art form that can be fully appreciated by our fellow Filipinos and the world. And therefore, it makes sense for us, in the Department of Tourism, to support as much as we can, this thriving industry that really does require government intervention for it to be sustainable for the long term," the tourism chief noted, citing as well that the partnership is included in the Marcos administration's push for transformative tourism.

But she expanded that this current collaboration with the FDCP goes beyond the establishment of the building, but toward the growing of the creative industry in the Philippines.

"What we envision with this Memorandum of Agreement today is not only the establishment of the film heritage building, but also a close collaboration and convergence between the FDCP, the DOT, as well as the TIEZA in growing the film industry of the Philippines, as well as the destination marketing for the country for films to be filmed in the Philippines. And therefore, we foresee that with our archives in cinema and film in the film industry, having a home, as well as in reaching out to the farthest reaches of the Philippines as far as the development of film tourism, it can only serve to grow the portfolio of Philippine tourism and most importantly, provide employment and livelihood to our fellow Filipinos who will benefit from expanding our film tourism portfolio," she added.

For his part, TIEZA COO Lapid expressed his appreciation to Secretary Frasco for her openness and support. He likewise noted that the partnership with the FDCP is a manifestation of the collective commitment of the DOT and TIEZA in preserving the legacy of Philippine cinema.

"This agreement not only signifies our collective commitment to preserving our cinematic legacy, but also amplifies the allure of Intramuros as a prime tourist destination in Manila. It enhances the experience of what this iconic site can offer, making our history and culture even more accessible and engaging. Let this MOA signing serve as a sign of our dedication to nurturing our nation's artistic and cultural architectures. Together, we make a journey that seamlessly integrates our cinematic heritage with heritage sites," he said.

FDCP chair Cruz also thanked both the DOT and TIEZA, saying that the ceremonial signing between the agencies is a *"collective dedication to safeguard and further the Philippine film heritage."*

"What we are all embarking on as we build the Film Heritage Museum is an aim to plant the seed of culture and history that will blossom and bear fruits for us, not just for our nation, but as the lasting legacy of future generations to come; one that will give all of us a deep sense of pride for cultural and national identity. Our facilities will serve as a haven for enthusiasts, a source of deep and rich knowledge for students and a treasure trove of Philippine cinema for both our fellow citizens and visitors from all around the world. Together, let's continue to nurture and celebrate our nation's film and artistic heritage," he said.

The agreement involving the film heritage building shall be effective until February 25, 2045, but is also subject to renewal of the parties involved. ***DOT***

Frasco to speak at UNWTO Global Tourism Economy Forum

Philippine Department of Tourism (PDOT) Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco has been invited to speak at panel discussions at the prestigious United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) Global Tourism Economy Forum (GTEF) slated on September 22 in the Macao Special Administrative Region (SAR).

The Philippine tourism chief will be joining tourism ministers from across the globe including His Excellency (HE) Hu Heping of China, HE Daniela Garnero Santanche of Italy, HE Celso Sabino De Oliveira of Brazil, and HE Priantha Fernando of Sri Lanka, among others.

Also expected to attend the meeting of global tourism leaders are UNWTO Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili, World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) President and CEO Julia Simpson, and GTEF Secretary Pansy Ho. Other panelists include Natalia Bayona, Executive Director of the UNWTO, and Harry Hwang, Director of the UNWTO Regional Department for Asia and the Pacific.

According to its website, the Global Tourism Economy Forum is a leading international exchange platform designed to promote the sustainable development of the global tourism sector. It is hosted by the Secretariat of Economy and Finance of the Government of Macao SAR (GSEF), and in collaboration with the UNWTO, the GTEF is co-organized by the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) and the China Chamber of Tourism (CCT) and coordinated by the Global Tourism Economy Research Centre (GTERC).

Secretary Frasco will be speaking as a panelist for the session titled "Sustainability in Focus: Navigating the Future of Tourism in Asia" and is expected to tackle the Philippines' key strategies to simultaneously pursue sustainability objectives while ensuring the growth of the local tourism industry.

These strategies would include the Philippines' profile as one of the megadiverse regions in the world, incorporation of multi-dimensional tourism in its product development, expansion of tourism development to emerging destinations, as well as the inclusion of Batanes Islands to the highly regarded UNWTO International Network of Sustainable Tourism Observatories (INSTO).

"I am honored to bring the Philippines' sustainable tourism plans, initiatives, and successes to the global stage to promote awareness of the incredible beauty and biodiversity of our country, and the work to sustain its development, conservation, and promotion to ensure tourism's continued contribution to our country's economy," Secretary Frasco said.

"This invitation is also timely as the Philippines has recently been elected as Vice President of the 25th General Assembly of the United Nations World Tourism Organization and Chair of the Commission for East Asia and the Pacific. Thus, this would also be an opportunity to highlight the Philippines' positive tourism rebound in Asia Pacific," the tourism chief added.

To recall, Secretary Frasco, the youngest member of the cabinet of President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr., and a former local chief executive, has introduced innovative programs aimed at promoting sustainability and expanding opportunities for tourism development in the countryside. Among her first directives is to include sustainability indicators in the National Accommodation Standards (NAS).

On her request, the DOT has also set an ambitious goal of training 100,000 tourism frontliners on the Filipino Brand of Service Excellence with modules that include sustainability principles. The DOT has also launched the Philippine Experience Program to diversify the country's tourism offerings beyond its natural assets through heritage, culture, and arts caravans across regions. ***DOT***

DOT chief bares bold prospects for PH tourism at Global Tourism Economy Forum

Macao SAR - Philippine Department of Tourism (PDOT) Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco shared the Philippine government's sustainability efforts for tourism and, at the same time, her bold prospects for the industry, before global tourism leaders attending the 10th edition of the Global Tourism Economy Forum (GTEF) in the Macao Special Administrative Region (SAR) last September 22.

"The Philippines is home to one of the longest coastlines in the world, as well as 70 to 80% of the Earth's biodiversity. We are one of the most megabiodiverse countries in the world and home to 10% of the world's marine protected area," Secretary Frasco said during the panel discussion among tourism ministers who are members of the United Nations World Travel Organization (UNWTO) Regional Department for Asia and the Pacific.

"Sustainability and tourism have been an absolute necessity and the driving force of development for our country. As early as 2009 with the passage of the law that created the Tourism Act, sustainable tourism was identified by our government as being integral to our socio-economic development, and therefore, that has been the guiding force towards the programs and plans for the development of our tourism industry," the tourism chief added.

With the approved National Tourism Development Plan (NTDP) 2023-2028, she said that the approach for the country's tourism blueprint was crafted from a sustainability standpoint incorporated under a seven-point agenda by which the DOT is currently operating at present.

"Under the administration of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., he approved recently the National Tourism Development Plan for the Philippines that will span from 2023 to 2028, and in this plan, we have approached tourism from a sustainability standpoint in a sense that we look at it from a developmental framework, identifying seven objectives for tourism development, chief of which is infrastructure," she said.

She emphasized that infrastructure has also been identified as a priority, given the geological features of the Philippines as a destination composed of 7,641 islands, over 80 provinces, hundreds of cities, and over 1,400 municipalities.

"This means that our government agencies have come together in a convergence to ensure, first of all, that we increase accessibility to our tourism destinations to the development of tourism roads," she noted.

Long-term development and sustainability measures for destinations

As the panel tackled sustainability strategies toward putting destination countries to the *"Destination 2030"* goal, Secretary Frasco said that the Philippines, under her helm as tourism chief, has taken a *"long hard look at what are the essential pillars to ensure the long-term development of the destinations"*.

"We take a long hard look at what are the essential pillars to ensure the long-term development of these destinations: basics, such as sewerage systems, water systems, waste management, and as well as the introduction of digitalization in the operations of tourism communities all over the country which is why, shortly, we are launching a Tourist Life Cycle App called "Travel Philippines" that will give opportunities for our tourists to be connected directly to our tourism destinations," she said.

"We foresee that through the approach of our President in tourism development, we would be able to ensure sustainable development in our award-winning Philippine destinations, expand development across the countryside towards the areas of Mindanao and other parts of northern Philippines, add more to our UNWTO sustainable tourism observatories, as well as our award-winning tourism villages, and herald to the world the best of the Filipino identity, the Filipino culture, and all the reasons to love the Philippines," the tourism chief also stressed.

Filipino tourism frontline workers at the core of the industry

Additionally, the Secretary said that as the country envisions itself as becoming a tourism powerhouse in Asia, the Filipino frontline workers remain at the core of the industry, thus, her bold prospects are, primarily for the industry employability five years from now.

"The Philippines envisions itself becoming the tourism powerhouse in Asia. A few years down the road, by 2028, we foresee that tourism would have been able to employ a total of over 34 million Filipinos in the country. After all, the end all and be all of the development of our tourism industry must be for the benefit of our countrymen," she said.

She also noted during the panel the importance of the Philippines' whole-of-nation approach toward tourism development by also capitalizing on other aspects of tourism equally.

"With our President's whole-of-nation approach towards tourism development, with an eye for sustainability, we envision that this will allow the Philippines to occupy a primary position in Asia, especially considering that what we wish to do is not only to further develop our nature and beach destinations–we are, after all, currently the world's leading beach and dive destination–but also to approach a multidimensional tourism component to our development. That means capitalizing well on the story of the Philippines, our heritage, our culture, and the work of our indigenous peoples and, overall, it is this comprehensive approach towards tourism development that we foresee would allow our country to have a sustainable tourism development in time to come," she said.

The GTEF is a leading international exchange platform designed to promote the sustainable development of the global tourism sector. This edition is hosted by the Secretariat of Economy and Finance of the Government of Macao Special Administrative Region (GSEF), in collaboration with the UNWTO, and co-organized by the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) and the China Chamber of Tourism (CCT), and coordinated by the Global Tourism Economy Research Centre (GTERC).

The panel discussion titled "Sustainability in Focus: Navigating the Future of Tourism in Asia" was moderated by Mr. Xu Jing from China, Vice Chairman of the Global Tourism Economy Research Center and Former Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific of World Tourism Organization, attended as well by Mr. Harry Hwang, Director of the UNWTO Regional Department for Asia and the Pacific; Ms. Maria Helena De Senna Fernandes, Director of Macao Government Tourism Office; Mr. Priantha Fernando, Chairman of Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority; and His Excellency Hussain Niyaaz, Ambassador of Foreign Affairs and Secretary of Economic Development Cooperation of the Maldives.

Setting the global tourism stage

To recall, under the leadership of Secretary Frasco, the Philippines was elected as Vice President of the UNWTO 25th General Assembly, and the Chairman of the Commission of East Asia and the Pacific in a ceremony in Cambodia last June–a feat last achieved by the country more than decades ago.

As chair, the Philippines will host the Joint Commission Meeting of the Commission for East Asia and the Pacific, and the Commission for South Asia in 2024. The event is expected to gather some 300 delegates from across the globe.

"Secretary Garcia Christina, the UNWTO is extremely honored and delighted for having the Philippines as our chair for the Commission for East Asia and the Pacific. And of course, we are very much looking forward to our joint commission meeting next year in Cebu, the Philippines. Thank you very much for being with us today," said Mr. Hwang. **DOT**

Tourism chief visits Tawi-Tawi in PHL, assures LGU, tourism stakeholders of Marcos admin's full support

Bongao, Tawi-Tawi - Tourism Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco assured Tawi-Tawians of the Department of Tourism's (DOT) support, as it continually pursues its objective of equalizing tourism opportunities ensuring tourism development where "no one is left behind".

This, as the tourism chief graced the 50th Kamahardikaan sin Tawi-Tawi last September 25, where she was invited as guest of honor.

"You may find yourselves in the farthest part of our country, but you are not far from the hearts and minds of our President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr. [and the National Government]," Secretary Frasco stated during her keynote message.

"Under the administration of President Ferdinand Bongbong Marcos, Jr., he envisions tourism that is transformative where opportunities are abundant and livelihoods thrive because the government reaches out its hand of collaboration to the farthest reaches of our country so that no destination is left behind in the development of the tourism industry. Hindi po kayo nag-iisa dito sa Tawi-Tawi. Nandito po 'yung inyong gobyerno para tumulong sa inyong turismo," the tourism chief continued.

The 50th Kamahardikaan sin Tawi-Tawi is the Province of Tawi-Tawi's celebration of its 50th founding anniversary, and its illustrious half-century of progress, unity, and vibrant cultural tourism heritage.

"As Secretary of the Department of Tourism, I am happy and honored to have made the journey here to the southernmost province of the Philippines. As a Filipino coming here for the first time, my heart brims with pride knowing that while the world has only recently begun to know of the beauty of Tawi-Tawi, the story of the strength, resilience, courage, and hard work of the people of Tawi-Tawi spans generations. At kahit napakainit po ng panahon ngayon, mas mainit pa rin po 'yong inyong pagtanggap sa amin. Kaya naman po alam ko na magtatagumpay talaga ang turismo ng Tawi-Tawi, sapagkat the best asset of the province of Tawi-Tawi, is no other than the people of Tawi-Tawi," she continued.

"Through the celebration of these festivals, the 50th anniversary of your province, and the remembrance of your history and heritage, you contribute greatly to the Filipino identity that we are so proud to herald to the world. Nakikiisa po ako sa inyo. Nakikiisa ang Department of Tourism sa pagsulong ng turismo sa Tawi-Tawi. Tawi-Tawi to the world. Love Tawi-Tawi. Love The Philippines," Secretary Frasco ended.

Tourism initiatives in Mindanao and Tawi-Tawi

As part of the National Tourism Development Plan (NTDP) 2023 to 2028, one of the primary objectives of the DOT is to equalize tourism development and to create more opportunities for emerging and lesser-known destinations.

In line with this objective, the DOT, Department of National Defense (DND), and Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) have entered into a memorandum of agreement to promote Mindanao as a peaceful and attractive tourist destination.

Moreover, the DOT has also launched its flagship program called the *"Philippine Experience Program: Culture, Heritage, and Arts Caravan"* designed to offer visitors a multi-dimensional tourism experience, which it piloted in the Davao Region and will be followed by more regional launches in the months to come.

Under the leadership of the Marcos administration, the DOT is also actively working with stakeholders towards the lifting of negative travel advisories imposed against specific areas in Mindanao, by further enhancing accessibility and safety for tourists.

Tawi-Tawi to the World

Carrying the theme *"Tawi-Tawi to the World: Bangsa, Hulah, Agama,"* the Kamahardikaan sin Tawi-Tawi celebration offers a glimpse into the province's rich cultural tapestry, resilience, and remarkable achievements through a series of festivals such as the Lepa, Agal Agal, and Maligay Festivals.

The Agal Agal Festival serves as a tribute to Tawi-Tawi's remarkable abundance and production of seaweed, rightfully earning the province its title as the "Seaweed Capital of the Philippines." This festival stands as a poignant reminder of the province's agricultural significance, showcasing captivating agricultural exhibits, traditional farming demonstrations, and vibrant displays of locally sourced produce.

To the delight of the crowd, Secretary Frasco gifted all ten participating municipalities, with Php 20,000 pesos each from her personal funds as a token of her love for them, or a total of Php 200,000.

The participating municipalities in the Agal-Agal Festival include: Sibutu, Bongao, Simunul, Sitangkai, Turtle Islands, South Ubian, Languyan, Mapun, Tandubas, and Sapa-Sapa.

In his statement, Vice Governor Al-syaed Sali expressed gratitude to the DOT, particularly Secretary Frasco, whom he said is the first tourism chief to ever join them in the said festival.

"To Secretary Frasco, ma'am, nagpapasalamat po kami at nabigyan niyo po kami ng pagkakataong makapiling kayo ngayong umaga. Sabi po nga nila, 'Ang unang pag-ibig—first love never dies.' So kung ihahalintulad po natin sa pag-ibig, kayo po ang unang-unang Tourism Secretary na nakapiling po namin dito sa selebrasyon ng Agal-Agal Festival. Habang buhay po ay makakatatak ka sa history ng Tawi-Tawi na aming nakapiling sa aming golden anniversary," said the vice governor.

Tawi-Tawi tour guides receive love from DOT

On the sidelines of the celebration of Tawi-Tawi's 50th founding anniversary, the tourism chief also met with the local tour guides from the region.

"We are grateful for our tour guides, for we know that despite all the hardships and difficulties faced by our country, by this region, and by your province in these many years, you have continued to tell the Filipino story with love," the tourism chief said.

"I am here to bring the message of our President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr., that it is time to fulfill the promise that is Mindanao," Secretary Frasco emphasized.

Recognizing the pivotal role that tour guides play in the continued resurgence of the country's tourism industry, Secretary Frasco showed her support by providing them with tour guiding kits which included a hat, an electronic lapel microphone, sunblock, bamboo tumbler, bamboo sunglasses, and a journal.

The tourism chief personally distributed the essentials to a group of 16 local tour guides.

One of the recipients of the kits, Nursida Jaluddin, an accredited tour guide and owner of Sidang Travel and Tour, expressed her gratitude and said "Isang taos-pusong pasasalamat na kayo po ay nandito at kapiling namin ngayon. Nagpapasalamat po kami ma'am (Secretary Frasco), sa inyo na kahit nasa dulo po kami ng Pilipinas dumating kayo sa araw na ito. Sana tuluy-tuloyy ang ating mga turista at hindi kami maiiwan kahit nandito kami sa dulo ng Pilipinas. Maraming maraming salamat po nandito po kayo ngayon".

Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) Chief Minister Ahod Ebrahim, Governor Yshmael "Mang" Sali, Hja. Jumda Sali, Vice Governor Al-syaed Sali, and Mrs. Maureen Omar-Sali graced the Province of Tawi-Tawi's 50th founding anniversary festivities along with Tourism Promotions Board - Philippines Chief Operating Officer Margarita Nograles, DOT Undersecretaries Myra Valderrosa-Abubakar, Ferdinand Jumapao, and Zamboanga Peninsula Regional Director Dara Mae Cataluña.

Also among the celebration's distinguished guests are Maguindanao del Norte Governor Sammy Macacua, South Cotabatoo Province Governor Jun Tamayo, Cotabatoo Province Governor Lala Mendoza, Zamboanga Sibugay Governor Ann Hofer, Municipality of Liloan Mayor Aljew Frasco, Tagum City Mayor Rey Uy, Municipality of Bongao Mayor Jimuel Que, and Tawi-Tawi mayors and Provincial Board Members. **DOT**

DOT's Bisita, Be My Guest program awards first raffle winners

Manila, Philippines - Department of Tourism (DOT) Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco last September 17 congratulated the first set of winners in the online referral tourism program, Bisita, Be My Guest (BBMG).

"On behalf of the Department of Tourism, I extend my congratulations to the first batch of winners of the Bisita, Be My Guest program. Thousands of Filipinos responded to the call of President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. to become Tourism ambassadors for The Philippines by inviting foreign visitors to come and experience the warmth and love of the Filipino people and discover the many reasons to Love The Philippines. A unique and memorable Philippine experience awaits you. Be our guest, you will love the Philippines," Secretary Frasco said in a video message.

The tourism chief further emphasized that the referral program, in partnership with the Department of Migrant Workers (DMW), specifically caters to the Filipino diaspora, with a particular focus on overseas Filipino workers who have been exceptional global ambassadors of the Philippines' beauty, wealth, and diversity. She expressed her hope that this incentivized program would motivate more Filipinos worldwide to participate.

In response to the referral incentive program, sponsors and invitees secured holiday packages to select Philippine destinations:

CAMIGUIN:

Ralph Regie Llosala (sponsor), a government employee from Mandaluyong City, invited his Filipino-American family friend, Victor Paulo (invitee), a retired civil engineer from Las Vegas, Nevada (represented by his daughter Rebecca Feria), both won a travel package to Camiguin Island.

SIARGAO:

Joyce Marie De Castro (sponsor), a Filipina ceramic artist in Tutzing, Germany, invited her German stepdaughter, Sophie Kölling (invitee), and they were both awarded a holiday trip to Siargao Island.

BOHOL:

Faith Cabiles (sponsor), a government employee from Davao City, sponsored her uncle, Fernando Montero (invitee), a New Jersey, USA resident and retired engineer, and will now visit Bohol together.

LEYTE:

Faith Cabiles (sponsor) likewise invited her aunt, Angelita Montero (invitee), also a US resident working as a nurse; both won a travel package to Leyte.

As one of the platinum sponsors, Cebu Pacific Air generously provided overseas winners with free round-trip international air tickets to and from their origin countries, along with domestic round-trip air tickets to and from local destinations for all winners.

The winners will enjoy complimentary accommodations and dining experiences at premier properties, including the Nouveau Resort in Camiguin; Nay Palad Hideaway in Siargao, as well as Conrad Hotel in Pasay City; Bluewater Panglao Beach Resort and Bellevue Resort in Panglao, Bohol; and The Oriental Hotel in Leyte.

For a detailed breakdown of the BBMG winning packages, please visit this link: https://bit.ly/45J1Aeo

Secretary Frasco also paid tribute to the late DMW Secretary Susan "Toots" Ople, recognizing her enduring legacy in the program's inception.

"As we celebrate the achievements of the BBMG program, we fondly remember the late Secretary Toots Ople, whose vision for fostering connections between Filipinos and the global community has paved the way for this remarkable initiative. Her dedication and love for our country and the welfare of the Filipino labor force abroad continue to inspire us," Secretary Frasco added.

The winners were selected through an electronic raffle draw conducted on May 11, this year, held at the DOT central office in Makati City. DOT officials and representatives from the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), Tourism Congress of the Philippines (TCP), and BBMG partner establishments witnessed the said draw.

A special draw will be held on October 10, while the second raffle draw is scheduled for the upcoming Christmas season in December 2023, with exciting prizes such as shopping vouchers and holiday packages awaiting participants. Lucky winners of the BBMG grand raffle draw will have the chance to win a brand new house and lot, and a condominium unit.

To register and join this initiative, please visit bbmg.philippines.travel. ***DOT***

Frasco thanks lawmakers for the swift approval and support for increase of Php 2.7 B DOT budget

Batasan Complex, Quezon City - Tourism Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco expressed elation over the swift approval of the House of Representatives (HoR) on the proposed budget of the Department of Tourism (DOT) during the plenary deliberations last September 19.

"The Department of Tourism expresses its utmost gratitude to the leadership of the House of Representatives and its members for strongly supporting the passage and increase of the Department's proposed budget for fiscal year 2024. Their resounding support reflects their recognition of tourism as an essential economic pillar for our country, which, given the fiscal tools to expand, can only increase the Php 1.87 Trillion in visitor receipts and 5.35 million jobs contributed by tourism to our economy thus far. We thank as well our tourism champion Isabela Representative Faustino "Inno" Dy, V. We assure the lower House of Congress that our budget will be utilized with utmost efficiency, transparency, and accountability turning into reality President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr.'s vision of transforming the Philippines into a tourism powerhouse in Asia," enthused the tourism chief.

"While the tourism industry has had robust recovery in the first year of the Marcos Administration, there is still much to be done to improve and increase competitiveness especially on the aspects of infrastructure, connectivity, digitalization, and equalization of tourism development across the country. We remain committed to take on the challenge of transformation inspired by our President's prioritization of tourism," added the tourism chief.

As of September 19, 2023, the DOT has recorded 3,877,183 visitor arrivals, or 80.77 percent of the Department's 4.8 million target for 2023.

To recall, the tourism chief at the budget hearing carried out by the HoR Committee on Appropriations presented the DOT's budget and necessary resources enclosed in the National Expenditure Program (NEP) for next year, which consists of an allocation of Php 2.99 billion which encompasses the budget for its attached agencies. The amount, which is a significant decrease from the DOT's Php 3.7 billion budget for the current year, prompted lawmakers to bat for the increase in the budget, noting the significant contribution of the tourism industry to the Philippine economy.

"While tourism has been identified by the President as one of the pillars of our economic recovery, it continues to receive one of the lowest budget among the national agencies, in fact, it was reduced by about a billion pesos from last year's budget," noted Representative Dy in his opening statement.

"Our ASEAN neighbors have given utmost importance to tourism as their major economic source by providing it with budget that is double, if not triple of what our Philippine Department of Tourism is receiving; such meager budget does not parallel the milestones that the DOT has achieved thus far, and that in itself is an achievement or a remarkable feat," the Congressman from Isabela added.

The move to increase the budget of the DOT was supported by OFW Partylist Representative Marissa Del Mar Magsino during her interpellation.

"The proposed budget for DOT for 2024 is only Php 2.604 billion, which is about a 24 percent decrease from its current budget for 2023 of Php 3.407 billion. This is a move backward and will not support the realization of the country's vision of a strong tourism industry. I, therefore, ask my dear colleagues to support not only the approval but for the rightful increase in the proposed budget of the DOT for 2024".

In 2022 alone, the tourism industry's international and domestic visitor arrivals raked in tourism receipts amounting to Php 1.87 trillion. In the same year, the Philippines recorded 2.65 million international arrivals breaching the initial target of 1.7 million.

"The approved budget will allow for the efficient and successful implementation of the Department's programs, projects, and activities designed to provide long-term solutions to some of the most pressing challenges that confront our country's tourism industry as summed up to three basic but crucial components of connectivity, convenience, and equality. The DOT is committed to utilizing the allotted resources judiciously with the benefit and well-being of the country as the most important concern," said Frasco.

During the HoR Committee on Appropriations deliberations, Secretary Frasco presented major tourism wins, including the establishment of the DOT Tourist Rest Areas across the country, improvement of gateways starting with the Ninoy Aquino International Airport Terminal 2, the facilitation of seamless entry protocols for travelers, and the diversification of tourism products and portfolio through various initiatives such as the Philippine Experience Program, among others. ***DOT***

PHL records more than 4M foreign visitors; DOT optimistic on robust rebound of tourism

The Department of Tourism (DOT) is optimistic about the Philippine tourism industry's continuing resurgence post-pandemic, with visitor arrivals to the country breaching the four million mark last September 29.

This, as it recorded a total of 4,005,465 visitor arrivals to the country from January 1 to September 29, 2023, in its latest report.

Tourism Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco made the announcement as she graced the opening of the Travel Sale Expo 2023 and the 1st Global Tourism Conference Trade Fair at SM Megamall.

"I am very pleased to deliver the good news that today, we have managed to breach the four million mark in international arrivals into the Philippines. This has brought into our economy over Php 316 billion," Secretary Frasco said.

"The recovery of the tourism industry was well seen by the end of 2022, with the Philippine Statistics Authority attesting that tourism contributed 6.2 percent to our GDP and contributed no less than Php 1.87 trillion combined visitor receipts for international and domestic. Most importantly, this resulted in the employment of our fellow Filipinos in the number of 5.35 million tourism-related jobs," she continued.

The tourism chief noted that, under the administration of President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr., the DOT is vigorously carrying out initiatives under the National Tourism Development Plan (NTDP) 2023-2028 that would sustain this growth and allow the industry to meet its target of 4.8 million arrivals this year.

"Under the leadership of our President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr., whose strong belief in tourism has united and given hope to our various stakeholders across the entire tourism value chain all over the country, one of the first things that the DOT, by working with other national government agencies, prioritized is the full reopening of the Philippines to travel and tourism to be able to bring quality jobs to Filipinos and regain livelihood lost due to the pandemic and various calamities that the country has had to face in recent years," Secretary Frasco said.

"As we continue to pursue tourism that is anchored on our strength as a warm and hospitable people, by showing our visitors the multitude of reasons to Love the Philippines, and by espousing inclusivity and sustainability in our plans and programs if only to ensure that no one gets left behind in our path to recovery, we only see these numbers growing in the coming months," she added.

Of the total arrivals for the period, 91.58 percent or 3,668,039 are foreign visitors, while 8.42 percent or 337,426 are overseas Filipinos.

Based on the DOT's arrivals report based on country of residence, South Korea ranked first in terms of the country's top source markets, delivering more than a quarter of the total international arrivals to the Philippines with 1,046,176 (26.12 percent), followed by the United States of America (USA) with 679,090 (16.95 percent); Japan with 221,671 (5.53 percent); China with 194,258 (4.85 percent); and Australia with 187,143 (4.67 percent).

Other visitors came from Canada with 164,168 (4.10 percent); Taiwan with 146,396 (3.65 percent); the United Kingdom with 114,096 (2.85 percent); Singapore with 107,674 (2.69 percent); and Malaysia with 72,008 (1.80 percent).

As may be recalled, under the leadership of Secretary Frasco, the DOT has identified seven main objectives in pursuit of the President's vision for the Philippines to be transformed into a tourism powerhouse in Asia, among these is the diversification of the country's tourism portfolio through multi-dimensional tourism, which focuses on growing niche markets including golf, dive, and meetings, MICE, as well as film and heritage tourism in addition to the country's more established tourism products.

In a media interview at the event, the DOT chief expressed her gratitude to all travelers that made the milestone for the industry possible, and enjoined tourists to continue supporting Philippine tourism.

"Nagpapasalamat po tayo sa ating mga friends and tourists from all over the world that continue to show their love for the Philippines. We are very close to our target of 4.8 million by the end of this year. Kaya naman po I continue to encourage our friends from all over the world to show their love for the Philippines," she said. **DOT**

Philippine Experience CALABARZON: Bacoor, Cavite's Bakood Festival

Tourism Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco led the opening of Bacoor City's 352nd founding anniversary coinciding with the conduct of the Philippine Experience Program (PEP) at the Bacoor Oval Track and Field Stadium last September 30.

The Bakood festival, which aims to promote the city's rich musical heritage and talent of the people of Bacoor, opened with a grand parade featuring marching bands competing from different parts of the country. Bacoor is known as the Marching Band Capital of the Philippines and holds an annual marching band competition in honor of its patron saint St. Michael The Arcangel.

"Habang nakita ko po yong inyong mga marching bands, all 47 of whom have distinguished themselves in various musical notes that you played, to the movements, and everything. I thought to myself that with every march that was taken, with every beat of the drum, with every note that has been played, and with every flag that has been raised, you are the reasons why we have the courage and the daring to say, world, love the Philippines." Frasco said.

Festivals are one of the primary tourism offerings of the Philippines, and to harness this unique trait, the Department of Tourism (DOT) launched the PEP to showcase the cultural heritage and gastronomic offerings of the different regions in the Philippines. The Calabarzon leg is the second edition for this year following the success of the Davao leg last June with members of the diplomatic corps. This edition of the PEP also invited members of the diplomatic corps, the media, tourism organizations, and other government offices.

According to data from DOT Region 4A, the region recorded 4,234,071 overnight tourists from January to June, higher by 12.97 percent from the same period last year. It also recorded 57,543,260 same day arrivals, higher by 129.18 percent in 2022.

"Kayo po ang nagbibigay ng mga rason kung bakit may confidence po tayong magsabi na deserving po talaga ang Pilipinas ng pagmamahal ng buong mundo." Frasco said in her speech.

Local officials Agimat Partylist congresswoman Lani Mercado-Revilla, Bacoor City 2nd District Mayor Strike Revilla, Vice Mayor Rowena Bautista-Mendiola, Provincial Board Member Ram Revilla Bautista, and Cavite 2nd District representative Bryan Revilla all expressed their support for the PEP in their separate speeches and hopes the program opens their province to more tourists for their respective areas.

The PEP invites members of the diplomatic corps, members of the media, tourism stakeholders, and representatives from other government offices to join a multi-day tour of the region. The participants are taken to the regions' festivals, tourist attractions, taste their food, and shown the unique tourism products. ***DOT***

CIVIL SERVICE ANNIVERSARY · WORLD TOURISM DAY · FAMILY WEEK

Hop-on Hop-off Tour

Persons with Disabilities Product Bazaar

In unison with this year's celebration of World Tourism Day, the Department of Tourism (DOT) Training and Development Division (TDD) has set up the Persons with Disabilities (PWD) Product Bazaar at the DOT-Central Office last September 21. This event emphasizes the spirit of inclusivity in the tourism industry.

Through this initiative, PWDs are given the space and opportunity to showcase their businesses, skills, craftsmanship, and the Filipino cultural heritage. This avenue enables tourism to unlock its vast potential by creating opportunities for building resilience, fostering sustainability, and promoting inclusive prosperity through innovation and entrepreneurship. ***DOT***

CleanTramuros – Drive

In line with the celebration of the World Tourism Day themed "Tourism and Green Investments", the Department of Tourism (DOT) joins the Intramuros Administration (IA) in its "Cleantramuros" initiative last September 27, to help in the upkeep of the historic Walled City of Intramuros.

A community-driven clean-up activity spearheaded by the Intramuros Administration (IA) since March, it promotes order and cleanliness within the Walled City.

Intramuros has won several times at the World Travel Awards as Asia's Leading Tourist Attraction, and in 2020, as the World's Leading Tourist Attraction. ***DOT***

DOT Palarong Pinoy

Palarong Pinoy showcases a rich collection of heritage activities that are deeply rooted in Filipino culture, including Pukpok Palayok (blindfolded striking of clay pots), Tug of War (team rope-dragging competition), and Sack Race (the hop sack relay).

In addition to these traditional games that kicked off at the DOT's Central Office Parking Area, a Zumba dance competition was held to warm up participants, who were treated to free ice cream for a day filled with physical activities and cultural celebration.

DOT officials in attendance included Administrative Service and Procurement Management Director Jovencio Zaragoza, Internal Audit Service Director Reynaldo Rosas, and DOTEA President Carolyn Gabriel. ***DOT***

DOT Sportsfest

Department of Tourism (DOT) Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco personally opened the DOT Sportsfest, a friendly inter-color competition among the Department's Central Office employees, held in its Makati Office last September 28.

The DOT Sportsfest returns after a five year hiatus, featuring employees divided into four color-coded teams: gold, royal blue, red, and green.

Sports competitions, running from October to early December, will include basketball, volleyball, badminton, table tennis, bowling, chess, darts, and games of the generals. ***DOT***

DOT Family Day

DOT BEYOND BORDERS

Foreign Offices Updates

Love for the Philippines felt at ITE HCMC 2023

The Department of Tourism (DOT) led the Philippines' participation in the 17th International Travel Expo Ho Chi Minh City 2023 (ITE HCMC 2023), which commenced last September 7 at the Saigon Exhibition and Convention Centre (SECC) in District 7, Ho Chi Minh City.

The largest tourism fair in the Mekong region anticipates over 25,000 visitors and more than 9,000 networking sessions between exhibitors and buyers, further boosting domestic and international tourism.

ITE HCMC 2023, themed "Connectivity, Growth, Sustainability," drew on its opening day over 3,500 delegates from 45 Vietnamese provinces and 42 countries and territories. The four-day expo will showcase more than 400 exhibitors and brands, including national and local tourism promotion agencies, tourism associations, research institutes, companies, travel agencies, accommodation providers, airlines, and transportation services.

The Department of Tourism's (DOT) "Love The Philippines" booth clinched the Best Booth Design award (booth size from 36sqm to 54sqm) at the 17th International Travel Expo Ho Chi Minh City (ITE HCMC) 2023 last September 8.

Located at the Saigon Exhibition and Convention Centre (SECC) in Vietnam, the Love booth accommodated six Philippine co-exhibitors, namely Philippine Airlines (PAL), Cebu Pacific Air, Okada Manila, Travelite Travel & Tours Co., Patio Pacific Boracay, and HOTEL101-Manila Group.

The 36-square-meter booth prominently showcased the country's adventure and nature tourism portfolio as the main attraction for Vietnamese travelers, with the DOT's latest branding campaign logo, "Love The Philippines," stamped over the picturesque Chocolate Hills of Bohol.

The pavilion also featured full-length photos of Vietnamese choice destinations like Manila, Ilocos, Cebu, Boracay, Ilocos, Puerto Princesa, and Coron, Palawan.

The solihiya weave pattern-printed columns complimented the customized LED-backlit signage of the "Love The Philippines" campaign.

The Department likewise enlisted the Sindaw Philippines Performing Arts Guild to perform trademark Filipino songs, including Bisita, Be My Guest, and traditional Kundiman songs, for the predominantly Vietnamese crowd.

At the heart of the Love The Philippines booth, the country's World Travel Awards trophy for Asia's Leading Dive Destination 2023 was proudly showcased, marking the Philippines' fifth consecutive win in this category. ***DOT***

on the DOT: Staff

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TOURISM RELATED EVENTS

Courtesy meeting with Korean Ambassador

Courtesy call with Emirates Airlines
Vice President for Aeropolitical and Industry Affairs

Courtesy call with Philippine Travel Agencies Association officials

Courtesy call with Iloilo Cultural Research Foundation, Inc.

Aviation Summit

Pasasalamat para sa Filipino Brand of Excellence Trainers

Tourism Pride Summit

Travel Sale Expo 2023

TO OUR OCTOBER BIRTHDAY CELEBRATORS

1	Jaime Victor Bayhonan	11	Lyka Angelika Lucas	21	Reynaldo Gabriel Jr.
2	Teresita Romanes	12	Jose Flores Jr.	23	Verna Glass
2	Catherine Rosal	13	Glenn Avila	23	Marian Obispo
3	Luz Navarro	14	Samuel Del Espiritu	23	Faeroe Jeanne Fontanilla
3	Gerard Panga	14	Nelia Arina	23	Mikaela Ortiz
4	Jaena Salabit	15	Nenita Saludo	24	Kylee Doreene Plaza
4	Janika Blesilda Velasco	16	Christian Ray Lingat	24	Nicole Angela Regina Benbinuto
5	Eleanor Palima	17	Victoria Margarita Paje	25	Florencio Capati Jr.
5	Alfredo Simbol	18	Alain Quesea	27	Marites Ballester
6	Claudette Olive Maximo	18	John Trexy Noveros	27	Filbert Ian Tan
6	Aylene Marie Sarmiento	18	Michelle Ferrater	29	Caesar Prudencio Regis
7	Jerlie Ganiga	18	John Mico Logronio	29	Gelena Asis-Dimpas
7	Kelly Gusi	19	Mary Antoinette Diaz	29	Mylene Tauli
8	Patricio Sarile Jr.	19	Christopher Morales	29	Cherry Martel Regala
8	Bon Derryl Pugal	19	Charlynne Buangan	30	Christine Joyce Soriano
9	Daniel Cruz	19	Dinnah Mee Lunjas-Cruz	31	Purificacion Molintas
9	Lemuel Palejaro	19	Donita Rose Andres	13	Anna Isabelle Malay
11	Marilyn Recarro	19	Kim Benedict Vito	31	Charmaine Dalisay-Jimenez